



Tom Barrett
Mayor, City of Milwaukee

May 16, 2007

**Testimony of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett to the Congressional Law Enforcement Caucus
Washington, D.C.**

Good afternoon Congressman Stupak and Caucus Members. It is indeed a pleasure to be back in Washington, catching up with old friends. And, it's an honor to be here today, during National Police Week, and having the opportunity to talk with you about issues that are important to Milwaukee and all of America's cities.

As many of you know, I served in Congress for ten years. It was a great ten years. I loved the issues, the debates and the dedication so many members had for their districts and our great country. But I must tell you; today I have an even better job.

As Mayor, I have come to appreciate – to a much larger extent than when I was in Congress – the real and tangible results that strong federal-local partnerships can produce. I can also attest to the consequences of not having a consistent partnership.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Policing Services Program, or COPS, is a prime example of a federal-local partnership that started strong, produced results and, unfortunately, is now a shell of what it once was.

Before I get into the benefits of the COPS program and the need for the COPS Improvement Act of 2007, I'd like to provide some information about Milwaukee. Milwaukee has approximately 600,000 residents. Our main sources of revenue are the property tax and state shared revenues. Milwaukee does not have the authority to institute local option taxes, such as a sales tax.

It has been my goal to make Milwaukee a safer and stronger city. In my 2007 budget, I increased the Police Department budget by \$5 million to a total of \$214 million. That is equivalent to 97.3% of our 2007 property tax levy.

By combining additional funds for overtime with funding for additional police recruit classes and adding civilian positions, I was able to put 50 additional officers on the street, the largest one year increase since 1996 and the greatest sworn strength the Police Department has had since 2000. In 2000, the City's level of sworn personnel was 2,004. By the end of this year, our sworn strength level will be at 1,977.

Although we had an 18% decrease in homicides in 2006, we had alarming increases in robberies and assaults – both over 30%. Non fatal shootings continue to plague certain areas of the City. Last year we had over 600 not fatal shootings.

In the first four months of this year, police have seized 1,000 guns, an increase of 29% over the 795 guns confiscated at this time last year.

Milwaukee is not unique among big cities. Violent crimes are increasing across the country. In Milwaukee, we have areas of the City that are in crisis. Over the past few years, thousands of felons have been released from their minimum-maximum sentences.

We're seeing more and more young adults and teens carrying illegal guns. Too many families and households have been unable to adjust to the new economy. There's more than one reason for the increase in violent crime. But, as public officials, our number one priority has to be to protect the safety of our citizens and to do that we're going to have to put more resources into policing.

In 1995, 1996 and 1997 the City of Milwaukee applied for and received funding through the COPS Universal Hiring Initiative, [Rounds one and two], the COPS Youth Handgun Initiative and the COPS Domestic Violence Grant. In that three year period, the COPS Program was used to partially fund 52 officers and 7 sergeants.

Each of the COPS' positions came with \$25,000 per position for three years – roughly 50% of an officer's 1997 annual salary and fringe package. In budget years 1995 and 1996, the City had a net increase of 136 officer positions of which 38% were funded with COPS Grants. If the \$4.4 million in COPS funding had not been available, the net new officer positions would have been closer to 85 or perhaps less, as this was the same time period the City's state shared revenues were declining. At the end of 1996, the City's sworn strength level was 2,177, the highest it had been in the nine previous years and still remains the highest level of strength in the last 20 years.

In the mid to late 90's and into the first half of this decade, violent crime went down dramatically from the crack cocaine years of the late 80's to early 90's. Violent offenders and drug crime offenders were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The crack cocaine market depressed. New policing strategies with more police and more support from the ATF, U.S. Attorney and other law enforcement agencies were put in place. The federally funded Weed and Seed program was launched; affording local, state and federal law enforcement entities to work with community partners in targeted neighborhoods.

There was a strong, federal-local partnership that really did focus on hometown security and the COPS program was integral to that effort.

Since that time, more individuals are being released from prison and many, unfortunately, are picking up where they left off.

Illegal guns are readily available and are used with increasing frequency in robberies, for revenge and to settle arguments. We have many needs to address – workforce, education, families - but as I said before, we must do all we can to protect our citizens.

The COPS hiring programs made it possible for Milwaukee to hire more police officers than the City could have otherwise afforded. Because Milwaukee has no taxing authority other than the property tax, we must rely on state and federal resources to provide services. As those avenues begin to close down, the pressure builds on the tax levy.

I stated earlier that in my 2007 budget, I increased the City's police budget by \$5 million – to \$214 million. Of that increase, \$4 million was used to produce a net increase of 50 police officers. If the COPS hiring initiative was still being funded at the 1995-96 levels, I would have added 80 officers to the streets.

A top priority of mine is to put additional police resources into our schools. I was glad to see that the hiring of school resource officers is included in the Cops on the Beat program included in the COPS Improvement Act of 2007. Our schools have enough challenges. Parents and students should not have to worry about safety and security.

I commend the sponsors of the COPS Improvement Act – both House and Senate- for increasing the authorized funding amount. In 1995, \$1.3 billion was appropriated for the COPS program. In 2007, the Administration requested \$32 million for the program but also wanted to rescind \$55 million in unobligated funds. That's math that needs correcting.

Under the new House Bill, authorized funding would increase to \$1.15 billion for each fiscal year 08 to 2013.

In addition to directing more resources to local units of government, the COPS Improvement Act of 2007 also sends a very important message to mayors and citizens across the country. That message is: The federal government is willing to partner on hometown security. It is understandable that after 9/11, our nation's focus and funding priorities shifted. It's time, however, to regain some balance.

Local police officers are being asked to do more with less. The illegal gun trade, the illegal drug trade and anti-terrorism efforts are not just local concerns. Guns, drugs and terror crisscross local and state boundaries. Milwaukee does not have a single federally licensed gun dealer. Yet, we have taken 1,000 guns off the streets in the first four months of this year. In order for cities to successfully attack these issues, we are going to need the resources and partnership that only the federal government can provide.

Before I conclude, I do want to ask members of the Law Enforcement Caucus to please listen to police chiefs and mayors with regards to repealing the gun tracing restrictions placed on the Department of Justice Appropriations bill. The Tiahrt language needs to be stricken and certainly should not be made permanent. Under the language, local governments are restricted from accessing the gun trace data that's needed to comprehensively attack gun violence. Law enforcement agencies are prohibited from notifying state or local authorities regarding problem gun dealers. These restrictions are counterproductive to our battle against illegal guns.

Congressman Stupak and members, thank you once again for allowing me to appear here today. It is my sincere hope that the Congressional Law Enforcement Caucus, members of the House and Senate and local officials can forge ahead together to produce significant gains in our nation's hometown security.